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Justice moving slowly

U.S. attorney won't rush Williams case

By **ROBIN FITZGERALD**
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GULFPORT - Federal court will likely take action in April on criminal charges in an inmate's death, said an attorney for the estate of Jessie Lee Williams Jr.

"Based on what I've been told, I've been led to believe that action in the federal case would take place at the end of April, but whether it means it will go to a grand jury then or a decision made by then, I don't know," Michael W. Crosby said Tuesday.

U.S. Attorney Dunn Lampton would not confirm a time frame for federal action in the case, but said the case is a priority and he is "not letting public sentiment cause someone to make a mistake in the investigation by trying to hurry it along to satisfy the public interest."

It's been 53 days since Williams was beaten in the Harrison County jail booking room and taken to the hospital, where he was removed from life-support two days later. No charges have been filed since the Feb. 4 incident.

A federal grand jury convenes the first and third week of each month, but a special grand jury can be convened if requested.

"It is a joint state and federal investigation," said Lampton, "and we are pursuing it just as rapidly as we can. As soon as we've got everything as far as the investigation, we will sit down with the district attorney and decide what is appropriate, and if it's charges, we'll decide which venue. At this point in time, everyone is considered to be absolutely not guilty."

If the tables were turned, charges would have already been filed, said Crosby, pointing to a quick arrest in the Dec. 3 slaying of Wiggins police officers Odell Fite and Brandon Breland.

"There was no video in that case but the police had no trouble arresting a suspect," Crosby said. "This is about simply doing what is right."

Videotapes from the jail booking room have not been released to Crosby, who seeks \$150 million in the civil lawsuit for the estate of Williams, a father of six. The sheriff's attorney on Monday told county supervisors he asked for permission to show them the videotapes but was told he couldn't do it.

Lampton confirmed he has told Payne to not comment on the case to anyone and said the secrecy involves federal statutes that apply to grand jury matters and ongoing investigations. The videotapes, Lampton said, likely will be released at a later time, "but probably not as quickly as you would like."

Arrests don't have to wait on indictments, said Crosby, adding he is concerned about Lampton giving legal advice to the sheriff when Lampton is investigating a homicide that happened "within the confines of the jail which is under the control of the sheriff."

"The public is demanding justice," Crosby said. "The lack of official comment is grinding on the nerves of the Williams family and the community."

The case would move more quickly, said Lampton, if it was only a state investigation.

"If we arrest someone, we have to be prepared to take it to a grand jury in 30 days. It is more important to worry about the end result, to be fair and have sufficient evidence."

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Resignation questions

Jailer's departure unexplained

By **ROBIN FITZGERALD**
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GULFPORT - The attorney for a former jailer accused in the wrongful death of an inmate won't say why the jailer resigned.

Ryan Teel, 29, is among five jailers identified in a civil lawsuit as participating in or failing to stop the alleged beating and torture of Jessie Lee Williams Jr. at the Harrison County jail booking room.

No charges have been filed, but Teel is accused of delivering the majority of the blows Feb. 4 that left Williams beaten beyond recognition, his skull crushed, and injuries inflicted on even the most private areas of his body, according to medical records and the civil lawsuit.

Teel's attorney maintains he is innocent.

The attorney for Williams' estate claims the death, ruled a homicide, is the result of "malicious and sadistic acts" performed by officers sworn to protect those awaiting their day in court. He also says he's perplexed and outraged over the lack of official response.

Teel's identity was officially confirmed only after he was named in the civil lawsuit, said Michael W. Crosby, attorney for Williams' estate. Teel is the only jailer placed on leave after Williams' beating. The only public record of his resignation March 8 is on a list of resignations accepted by the Harrison County Board of Supervisors earlier this week.

"I'm not going to say anything whatsoever about (Teel's) resignation or if it was related to the incident," said Jim Davis, Teel's attorney.

In the meantime, Teel will find another job, Davis said.

"People change jobs all the time. He has always maintained a job and he always will."

The case remains under state and federal investigation.

U.S. Attorney Dunn Lampton this week confirmed he has advised Sheriff George H. Payne Jr. to remain silent while he cooperates with the multi-agency investigation.

"There is no official stance, either verbal or by action, which tells the Williams family that our law enforcement believes that what happened to Jessie was a crime or that it was wrong," Crosby said.

"I know that our leaders will not comment, but can't any of them tell us what their position is with respect to what an officer under their charge is to do when he/she is standing by when another officer is abusing, torturing, and killing a human being? Haven't they taken an oath to uphold the law and enforce the law? Isn't their motto 'to protect and serve?'

"In Jessie's case, the 'protect' part was forgotten."

Teel

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CASE NO. 1:06-cv-00196-LG
Williams
VS. Thurston Co. MS
DEFENDANT'S EXHIBIT GP-2
DATE _____ IDEN. _____
DATE 7/4/06 EVID. _____
BY J. [Signature]
AO 386A Deputy Clerk